

THE NEW YORK TIMES, SATURDAY, MARCH 6, 1982

## N.R.C. Pessimistic on Global Nuclear Inspections

By JUDITH MILLER  
Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, March 5 — The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has concluded that international inspection alone could not "reliably" warn that a country was diverting, reprocessed or highly enriched fuel for use in atomic weapons.

The N.R.C.'s conclusion goes beyond previous expressions of concern about weaknesses of the International Atomic Energy Agency, the 115-nation group that promotes and monitors peaceful uses of nuclear material.

The conclusion is contained in an 11-

page letter, dated last Tuesday, from Nunzio J. Palladino, chairman of the commission, to the chairman of three Congressional panels. The letter, which responds to questions about the adequacy of the international agency's inspection system, was delivered to Congress the same day, three months after the request was made.

The commission singles out nuclear reprocessing and enrichment plants as posing "particularly difficult technical" inspection problems because they contain separated plutonium or highly enriched uranium, known as HEU.

"Because they can be transformed readily into weapons," the letter says,

"we cannot count reliably on inspection alone to provide warning of diversion of HEU and separated plutonium in time to prevent weapons assembly if the necessary preparatory work has been done."

Those who received the letter said that the N.R.C.'s conclusion raised questions about the nuclear policies being pursued by the Reagan Administration, which supports both reprocessing of spent or used fuel and enrichment of uranium as part of its effort to help the sagging nuclear industry.

Representative Richard L. Ottinger, Democrat of Pleasantville, N.Y., and chairman of a House subcommittee

that oversees the N.R.C., said the letter "demonstrated the danger of the Administration's policy of promoting the export of enrichment facilities and continued development of reprocessing."

Senator Gary Hart, Democrat of Colorado and the ranking minority member of the Senate subcommittee on nuclear regulation, called the three-month delay in responding to the panel's questions "inexcusable." He added that the N.R.C. had failed to respond to some of the Democrats' most important questions.

### One Question Deleted

Victor Gillsky, a commission member who has been most critical of the safeguard system, pointed out at a Congressional hearing Wednesday that the N.R.C., at the request of the State Department, had even deleted one of the

legislators' questions from the commission's response. Mr. Gillsky strongly objected to the deletion of a question about whether the N.R.C. had evidence or reason to believe that there had been any thefts or diversions of nuclear materials from plants monitored by the international regulation agency.

In his letter, Mr. Palladino said the commission could not respond fully to the questions, including whether the safeguard system was adequate, because it was not "authorized" to give secret information to Congress. The letter noted, however, that Mr. Gillsky believed that "international safeguards are not adequate."

In a separate statement, John F. Ahern, an N.R.C. member, said a country would have to have done the "necessary preparatory work" in order

to divert highly enriched uranium separated plutonium for immediate use in an atomic weapon. Specifically, he said this would include design of a weapon and fabrication of all components of a bomb. These tasks, he said, were "very difficult and require a group which is highly sophisticated technically."

### Other Weaknesses Cited

The N.R.C. letter cited other weaknesses in the international inspection system, including difficulty in using so-called on-line refueled reactors which use heavy water and are refueled while operating. In addition, Mr. Palladino wrote that the international agency's ability to account for nuclear material transfers between countries needs improvement.